1 The practices of metropolitan life in wartime

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When we survey the practices of metropolitan life in wartime, we confront an overwhelmingly complex story. In volume I of this study, we interpreted the evidence we compiled on the social and economic history of the war by using the theories of Amartya Sen on entitlements, capabilities, and functionings.[1] In this, our second volume devoted to the cultural history of the war, we adopt a more eclectic approach.

No one interpretive framework can possibly accommodate the richness of cultural expression and activity in Paris, London, and Berlin in the war years 1914 to 1919. Instead, we explore a series of different approaches, some more useful than others in particular chapters. It may be helpful to survey these interpretive approaches, and then to point to their particular utility in the construction of this book.

War, metropolitan life, and identities in wartime

The first interpretive tool we employ here is the notion of identity. This concept has a huge literature surrounding it, drawn from a number of different disciplines, encompassing identity crises, identity politics, gendered identities, regional identities, ethnic identities, and national identities, among other categories.[2] We have drawn on this literature in a restricted sense, exploring notions of 'identity' in three ways.

The first is the sense of identity as the apparel of individuality. Here identities are constructed; they are self-fashioned, and once fashioned,

[1] Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Oxford, 1981); Sen, *Development as freedom* (New York, 1999).

[2] Erik H. Erikson, *Young man Luther: a study in psychoanalysis and history* (New York, 1962); Erikson, *Identity and the life cycle* (New York, 1980); Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, 1980); Natalie Zemon Davis, *The return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Gábor Gyáni, *Identity and the urban experience: fin-de-siècle Budapest*, trans. Thomas J. DeKornfeld (New York, 2004); Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle (eds.), *Identität* (Munich, 1996, 2 vols.).

they can be tailored and retailored to suit different purposes.[3] For instance, the figure of Charlie Chaplin was iconic during the war. He was a symbol, to be sure, but he was also a very individual figure, someone who did things no one else could do with his body, his gestures, his face. Songs celebrated him; the cinema popularized him as a Londoner, a Cockney, a veteran of the London stage. Chaplin's identity on stage or screen was unique. To be sure, individual identity is both personal and collective. As Halbwachs put it, we are never the first people who know who we are. Others tell us. But what we do with that knowledge is a matter of temperament and opportunity.

The same can be said of the millions of British men who put on a uniform voluntarily in 1914 and 1915. When they did so, they took on a new identity, that of a soldier, but they did not do so alone. There were as many reasons for volunteering as there were volunteers, but many joined up in groups, with their 'pals' from work, from school, from football teams, and the like.[4] Their identities were both individually fashioned, a matter of choice, and a matter of group loyalty.

There is no need to separate individual and social identities. What is important is that a war of massive mechanical destruction made individuality even more precious than ever before. That is why letter-writing and photograph-taking were so important; they reminded soldiers who they had been before and who (God willing) they would be after the war. When a soldier was discharged, he left his wartime uniform and gear behind, and became a civilian again. Some were not so fortunate; they never escaped from their wartime identity.[5] They were the unlucky ones. The majority found a way back home again back to their civilian identities.

The second sense of the term we use in this study is more strictly collective. It is national and about belonging to one side in a conflict. An identity in wartime is a passport to inclusion in one warring side, defined in large part by its exclusion of the 'other', a term reserved (though never exclusively) for the enemy. When the Academy of Medicine in Paris erased from its ledgers those of its members who were German, they were defining their own identity by negative reference.

Identities described opposites on the home front too. Here we touch on the critical separation of the identity of the soldiers from that of the people whose lives and homes they joined up to defend. In this sense, identities were braided together too; once again they entail pairs or opposites informing the moral economy of metropolitan life in wartime. Most of

[3] Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning*.
[4] Jay Winter, *The Great War and the British people* (London, 2002), ch. 2.
[5] Eric Leed, *No man's land. Combat and identity in the First World War* (Cambridge, 1979).

the time these two collectives – soldiers and civilians – eyed each other with abiding respect, solidarity, and affection, but at other times, with uneasiness and anxiety. This distinction informed the moral code of austerity and sobriety through which the shirker, the black marketeer, and the profiteer became the internal enemy, enjoying the spoils of war while soldiers faced unimaginable hardship.

A third way in which we use the term 'identity' lies between the individual and the national. It is local in character. Metropolitan identities rested on a sense of place. What did it mean to say that one was a Londoner or a Berliner in wartime? What characteristics did the class of people share who claimed to be Parisian? To be sure, some simply meant by claiming to be Londoners that that city was their place of birth or residence. But there was another dimension to this metropolitan identity, one related to a sense of a shared landscape and a shared set of cultural references located in that particular place. Berliners were people strolling around the Tiergarten, just as Londoners were those meandering through Regent's Park. Other notions of metropolitan identity arose out of proximity or access to public sites, like Piccadilly Circus, Potsdamer Platz, or Place de la Concorde. And within these cities, inhabitants identified themselves with those living in smaller *quartiers*, such as Cockneys in east London or Parisian workers in Belleville.

We all live with multiple identities, rarely troubling over the contradictions between them. But in wartime, identities became both clearer and more significant than ever before. Just consider the distinction between combatants and non-combatants; not wearing a uniform was supposed to confer a privilege – immunity from fire – when an invading army crossed a populated region. It did not always do so, but the norms were clear.

In wartime, identities on all levels – that of the individual, the *quartier*, the city, the nation – always overlapped. Some forms became essentialized in wartime. That is, the inherent character of one group of people was read into their behaviour. Stereotypes proliferated, and hatreds drew on them with gusto. For these reasons, everyone needed a cultural passport in wartime. Without it, without visible or audible signs of commonality with the neighbours on your side, ordinary people risked being identified as the enemy.

In wartime, individuals changed the clothes of their lives; they put on uniforms; they accepted, however reluctantly, the division between 'us' and 'them', and knew how to distinguish between the two; and they expressed their solidarities in terms of their attachment to particular places and sites. The outbreak of war brought into focus or clarified individual, national, urban, and local identities in these three capital cities. How this happened is one of the themes of this book.

In this study, we take identities to be performative. They are expressed and reiterated in public at particular sites and times. Once again, we historians have benefited from the work of our colleagues in neighbouring disciplines who have highlighted the significance of performativity in speech acts, in gendered dress and behaviour, and in ritual life.[6] Our working definition of the term 'identity' is, therefore, active, dynamic, and unstable. Identities emerge and are reaffirmed through the cultural performance of social bonds. Those bonds can be intimate, confined to the family or a few friends. Or they can be broader than that.

During the Great War the cultural performance of the social bonds of nationhood, of solidarity and determination, as well as of protest and opposition, were expressed time and again in Paris, London, and Berlin. By undertaking a scholarly perambulation through these three cities, we see not only the sites that everyone in the cities recognized as iconic or symbolic – Unter den Linden, Piccadilly, the Champs Elysées – but we also consider the reconfiguration of these sites and others much less prominent as locations where the social bonds of citizenship and solidarity were performed.

One example is the railway station. Ports of entry to the city, sites of commerce and commuting for generations, these vast buildings became places where identities were exchanged: from civilian to soldier, and with luck, back again from soldier to civilian. Street life expressed solidarities too, as millions of soldiers from all parts of the world strode through the boulevards and alleys of these towns. Clubs, pubs, bars, theatres, and cabarets – vital elements in metropolitan life – were also places where solidarities were formed and displayed, for cash, to be sure. In London's theatre district, civilians played soldiers on stage, in front of audiences made up largely of soldiers playing civilians while on leave. In metropolitan hospitals, soldiers under treatment who were ambulatory and itching to wander around the streets of London were required to wear blue uniforms. This dress told everyone they saw or met who they were: they were soldiers recuperating from war wounds, rather than shirkers, wriggling out of their military responsibilities.

[6] Judith Butler, *Excitable speech: a politics of the performative* (London, 1997); Butler, 'Giving an account of oneself', *Diacritics*, vol. 31, no. 4 (Winter, 2001), pp. 22–40; Jonathan D. Culler, 'Philosophy and literature: the fortunes of the performative', *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, no. 3 (Autumn, 2000), pp. 503–19; Judith Butler, Stanley Aronowitz, Ernesto Laclau, Joan Scott, Chantal Mouffe, and Cornel West, 'The identity in question', *October*, vol. 61 (Summer, 1992), pp. 108–20.

Other identities were on display in the great exhibition halls of these cities, which highlighted the nature of civilization on one side or the other. The same effort to express the cultural achievements of the nation at war is evident in schools, where the next generation of recruits was educated and instructed in their civic and national duties. Hospitals were an essential part of the metropolitan landscape; they were places where identities were confirmed or reaffirmed: able-bodied or disabled; sane or insane. They were sites of hope and anxiety in equal part. So were churches.

In this book, we see what were the practices of metropolitan life by moving through these cities. The structure of this book follows a series of trajectories which were well known and well established long before the outbreak of war in 1914. But considering each of these sites shows how the exigencies of war provided a framework for their re-appropriation and their reconfiguration as places where the social bonds of wartime were performed in public.

As in every other facet of the history of the war, including the economic and social themes examined in volume 1, the boundaries between the private and public realms were weakened or at times erased in wartime. That is why we have included a chapter on the *foyer*, the household, and the ways in which it became a centre of activity linking those at home and those at the front.

Were these capital cities simply larger versions of every small town and village in these three combatant countries? In a way, the answer is yes, since mobilization happened everywhere, and no town was spared the news that someone had died at the front. Identities were performed in village squares and churches as vividly as in the streets of the great cities. But in another sense, these metropolitan centres were both unique and representative. Their status as the political centres of the three major warring nations separated them from other cities and towns. Here is where the President of the French Republic resided, though like everyone else in positions of power, he left the city between September and December 1914 when Paris risked encirclement. Here is where the British Parliament met throughout the war, as did the Reichstag. Here is where the great ministries of state had their offices, and where the general staffs met the politicians to coordinate their war plans.

There were other ways in which Paris, London, and Berlin were unique. Without them, this industrialized war simply could not have been waged. They were sites of transit on a scale which dwarfed virtually all provincial cities. Without Paris, the French army simply could not have moved east or north depending on where the German threat was heaviest at the time. Without London, the Allied armies would have been

stripped of all their essential supplies. Berlin was different. It was both the youngest and the most dynamic of the three, having quadrupled in population between 1870 and 1914. But its location at the core of the German empire put it at a greater distance from the Western front, where the war was won and lost. Paris and London were closer to the fighting, and absolutely critical centres of supply and communication. But Berlin mattered too. When potatoes sent to Berlin for the home population did not reach their destination, but were somehow pilfered en route and sold at a vast premium, a social crisis emerged. To be sure, the German army was defeated in the field in the summer of 1918, but by then thousands of men in uniform knew that their families living in the capital city were going hungry. Why carry on when victory was out of sight and further suffering at the front and at home appeared to be absolutely pointless? What happened in Berlin, just as much as in Paris and London, mattered crucially to the men at the front.

Metropolitan space, place, and site

Here, as throughout this study, the boundaries between economic and social history, on the one hand, and cultural history, on the other, crumble. In this volume the sites we choose to investigate are very material ones. They are stable physically, and take a lot of cash to maintain, but they are unstable culturally. As Michel de Certeau put it, 'spatial practices in fact secretly structure the determining conditions of social life'.[7] He went on further to define cities spatially, and we follow his lead in viewing metropolitan life as 'a way of conceiving and constructing space on the basis of a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties'.[8] It is the transformation of what de Certeau terms 'the operations, the urban practices' surrounding particular urban sites which constitutes one of the central themes of this book.

De Certeau famously began a disquisition on what constitutes a city by viewing it from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre in Manhattan. But this panoptical view is not the one he believed could tease out the secrets of city life. To this end, he urged us to concentrate on walking, on wandering, on moving through the city in the ways city-dwellers do. The story of urban practices, he insisted,

> begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series. They cannot be counted because each unit has a qualitative character: a

[7] Michel de Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, 1984), p. 96.
[8] Ibid., p. 94.

style of tactile apprehension and kinesthetic appropriation. Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together. In that respect, pedestrian movements form one of those 'real systems whose existence in fact makes up the city'. They are not localized; it is rather they that spatialize.[9]

We adopt de Certeau's vision in this book, and invite the reader to join us in a perambulation through these three cities. The map that we describe is one that city-dwellers drew for us by describing different trajectories in the course of their daily lives. 'Walking', de Certeau observed, 'is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statement uttered.' To walk through a city is to appropriate it; moving through the metropolis at ground level 'is a spatial acting out of the place; and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions',[10] horizontally as between *quartiers* adjacent to each other, and vertically as between social and political classes. In effect, city-dwellers 'spoke' the city by traversing it. And so do we.

First we start at the railway stations; then move on to the city streets themselves, seeking out points of entertainment, and evading those charged with enforcing public order. We enter the music halls and pubs, and then turn to more elevated, more refined environments – the exhibition halls, the great museums, the schools and universities. Inevitably we come to the great squares, the public places in which and on which so much history had been written, and watch the battle between those groups which wanted to seize them to make urban political statements and the police who preferred silence to uncontrolled speech and demonstrations.

These destinations were prominent and essential metropolitan sites, and urban trajectories inevitably crossed them. But there were many other trajectories which both paralleled and diverged from them. These embraced the sites and rites of passage of individual and family life. We enter the *foyers*, the hospitals, and churches, which were where families lived, sought help, worshipped, and died. And finally we arrive at metropolitan cemeteries, the end of the line. In this network of urban sites, we depart from de Certeau, who referred to them as administrative units for the broken down, the 'waste products' of metropolitan life.[11] We concentrate on how the appropriation of these spaces by city-dwellers themselves transformed their functional operations into culturally significant ones.

Each of these sites was radically transformed by the war. In Paris and London the threat of aerial or artillery bombardment loomed large. The

[9] Ibid., p. 97. [10] Ibid., pp. 97–8. [11] Ibid., p. 94.

cities were darker places than they had been for a century; enemies were watching from the air. The fact that death could and did come from above set a new and still vivid precedent for the century of total war which followed. This new sense of danger in metropolitan life makes it difficult to adopt an entirely street-level perspective in this study. Those who traversed these cities certainly looked up, and hoped that what they saw would not kill them. Such a sense of death and danger must be added to our understanding of metropolitan cities at war.

What is most striking, and most remarkable, is the stoicism of many city-dwellers, the way they bore their anxieties over the fate of loved ones in uniform, and accepted these new and alarming facts of urban life. Metropolitan populations continued to 'write' and to 'speak' their cities through their mundane cultural practices, but in wartime they did so in a multitude of ways, some pointing towards a familiar past, others towards an uncharted future.

In the following chapters, we explore many forms of cultural adaptation to war through what we term sites of cultural expression. They are in no way exhaustive; other sites could have been chosen. In each of them, representations were fashioned, adapted, and consumed. Cultural artefacts – letters, diaries, parcels, posters, plays, sculptures, street shrines, banners, wreaths, and so on – were produced and displayed or sold or sent on their way. An analysis of each of these sites in the three capital cities can teach us much about the way the structural effects of the conflict, explored in volume I of this project, were configured, imagined, and endured in wartime and after.

Comparisons

In volume I, the agenda of comparative history was explored in straightforward ways. Thus, wherever possible, similar statistical time series were constructed or reproduced enabling us to explore variations in military mobilization, work, wages, consumption, and public health in these three cities. In the field of cultural history, the issue of comparison is more difficult and more complex, and thus we offer two kinds of comparison in this volume. The first is fully comparative. It treats the three cities as equals, enabling us to see how, in various sites in all three cities, different representations emerged.

The second approach may be termed 'relational' in that in certain chapters we focus primarily on one metropolitan centre, highlighting its special cultural forms and expressions by reference to the other two cases. The choice of this second option – the relational mode of comparison – is dictated by the sources: there are areas where the cases are so different,

and the archival traces so uneven, that it is wise to use what we might term a 'geometrical approach', in placing one case at the centre, and using evidence of the other two cities to make a particular point about that particular case. Thus the politics of public space was a deeply important matter in London; in Paris and Berlin, the army hierarchy stood in the way of such debates. Similarly, the river dominated parts of the urban landscape in Paris and London; not so in Berlin. The chapters in this book adopt a pragmatic approach here, and explore comparison in whatever way helps to make sense of the particular cultural practices under review.

At the same time, we are well aware of the limits of all comparisons in this field. One reason for diffidence is linguistic. The nuances of particular historical notation make comparison both essential (to enable us to grasp particularity) and maddeningly difficult. Think of the difficulty of translating the phrase 'shell shock', or in rendering the shades of meaning in the English phrase 'war memorial' into other European languages. 'Shell shock' is not 'choc traumatique', and war memorials are not 'monuments aux morts'.[12] Poetry is fundamentally untranslatable, which is one reason why the works of Wilfred Owen, for example, iconic in Britain, were not translated into French for eighty years. The receptors are different; what James Joll called the 'unspoken assumptions' are different.[13]

In volume 1, we highlighted both affinities and clear differences among the three cities' wartime histories. Here, we also use comparison to show similarities as well as to disclose the ineluctable, irreducible differences and particularities of national and urban cultures. One function of comparative history, therefore, is to help frame in a more informed way questions of particular national experience. From this angle, comparative history is a partner – perhaps an essential partner – of national history, a way of deepening our understanding of individual cases, and not a different or alternative field of study at all.

One of the attractions of metropolitan history is the way it enables us to escape from the mistaken view that a nation's cultural history is homogenous. At times, comparisons disclose commonalities among these cities. Popular theatres, hospitals, and cemeteries, for instance, were familiar and integral parts of the urban landscape. In each case, people of very different social origins came together to these places for roughly similar reasons. But in other cases, particularities, even singularities, in the way these cities were organized, must be recognized. Comparisons of different kinds tell us what these differences were, and help us see even

[12] Special issue, *Journal of contemporary history* (January 2000).
[13] *1914: the unspoken assumptions; an inaugural lecture 25 April 1968* (London, 1968).

during the dark years of the Great War what made these cities unique and vibrant spaces to those who lived in them.

Metropolitan nostalgia and metropolitan iconoclasm

At this juncture, it is apparent that we must vary the conceptual tools we use in order to understand the complexity of metropolitan life in this period. To privilege the subject of identities and sites is important, but it should not be done to the exclusion of other themes and other cultural practices. To this end, we have employed a binary distinction between 'nostalgia' and 'iconoclasm' as poles between which the cultural life of these three cities unfolded.

This distinction enables us to see more clearly a theme running through the cultural history of the Great War which has a distinctively metropolitan facet. That theme is the extent to which the first fully industrialized war in history precipitated a deluge of traditional forms of language, perception, and signifying practices. In Paris, London, and Berlin, as elsewhere, the terms and images used to shape these discursive forms arose out of and shaped a partly mythical construction of a pre-war metropolitan world of pub, café, music hall, and theatre. These sites of sociability and entertainment presented a highly sentimentalized set of images and sounds, which flourished during a war which introduced very un-sentimental forms of destruction and bloodshed. Other sites of cultural work similarly partook of this cultural move. The *foyer* was mythologized, and gender roles deepened, at a time when households and the sexual division of labour were being turned upside down. The nostalgic turn in metropolitan cultural life is one of the key subjects of this book.

At times parallel to it, at other times intersecting it, was a very different cultural vector. What might be termed cultural iconoclasm was a perennial phenomenon in these three cities, and though the war set limits on what could be thought or at least what could be said or written, there remained pockets of resistance which flourished, particularly in the latter part of the conflict and in its aftermath. Metropolitan cultural life was in one sense the product of these two vectors: one moving back in time, another moving ahead. Together they met in particular places on particular streets and at particular times in these three capital cities.

Metropolitan nostalgia

One way of framing these comparisons is in terms of a certain kind of cultural activity loosely gathered under the heading of 'metropolitan nostalgia'. First it may be helpful to consider what the term 'nostalgia'